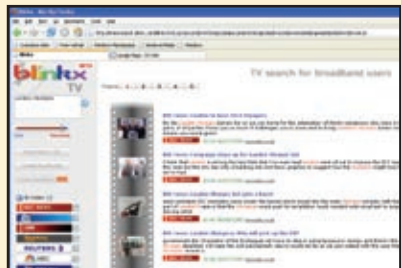




SOFTWARE NEWS

SEARCH VIDEO CLIPS

Blinkx has launched its video clip search service at www.blinkx.com. The search engine trawls the web looking for video clips but, rather than guessing the contents by scanning for metadata, it annotates the audio track. This results in much better matches and, although some of the transcriptions are wrong, you can usually get the gist. The service is free to use and is available now.



MOZILLA WELCOMES THE PROSPECT OF XP-ONLY IE 7

The Mozilla Foundation anticipates that Microsoft's Internet Explorer 7 (IE 7) release will convince many businesses to switch to Firefox. The reason, according to the foundation's Asa Dotzler, is that IE 7 will require at least Windows XP, and many organisations are happily running Windows 2000 and have no reason to change.

"We're excited about Microsoft launching IE 7," he said. "It will remind a lot of people that if they want better features they have to spend hundreds of dollars upgrading."

He added that while Firefox currently supports Windows 98, if that were to stop, users could still compile their own version because the browser is open source. "This is one of the advantages of open source: you can avoid the forced update cycle," he said.

Firefox recently recorded 70 million downloads since the release of version 1.0 in November 2004. OneStat's latest browser usage figures, released in April, put its share at 8.69 per cent.

GOOGLE GETS DOWN TO EARTH

Google has released its Earth browser. Made of high-resolution satellite images, it gives you a bird's-eye view of any part of the world. The search engine finds towns, points of interest and even postcodes.



The quality of the photography is amazing and you can rotate the view and change the elevation. Some areas have better photography than others, but it's improving all the time. You can download the browser from <http://earth.google.com>.

REVIEW VIDEO ENCODING/PLAYBACK

DIVX DivX Create Bundle

RATING ★★

PRICE \$20 (around £11)

DETAILS www.divx.com

DivX is a video format with a colourful reputation. Technically, it's very impressive. By combining MPEG4 video compression with MP3 audio, it can provide high-quality video and sound in files around a sixth of the size of those on DVD-Video discs. This means DivX can be used to fit a feature-length video on a CD-R while maintaining excellent quality. However, this impressive capability has seen DivX gain popularity among illegal file sharers, who use it to transfer commercial films over broadband connections through peer-to-peer software.

The format also has reputable uses, though. Some network media players support it, making it an excellent format for streaming video from the PC to the living room. It's also used for legitimate video distribution over the net, and movie trailers, music videos and amateur films are available for download at www.divx.com and elsewhere. As 1Mbit/s and faster broadband connections become more widespread, DivX may well become popular for high-quality video streaming, too.

The DivX Create Bundle includes the DivX Player, which you can also download separately for free, plus the latest version of the DivX Pro codec (version 6) and an encoding utility called DivX Converter. However, it's the DivX format itself that has seen the biggest update. DivX 6 adds support for interactive menus, subtitles, multiple audio tracks and chapter points. The result is that DivX movies behave like DVD-Video discs.

Despite the format's impressive capabilities, the Converter utility is disappointing. It's designed for ease of use, and to an extent it succeeds; you just drop a video file where it says Drag and Drop here, choose one of four quality profiles and click Convert. However, the only option for interactive video content is the ability to merge various files together with a boring-looking menu. This may be handy but it's hardly impressive compared to even the most basic DVD-authoring packages. We would also have liked a custom profile option to control the bit rate and resolution of the outputted files. Of the four profiles on offer, only the Home Theater setting is of any practical use, providing high-quality PAL-resolution files at 1.4Mbit/s (roughly 10MB per minute). However, there is an option to fit content to a 700MB CD-R, which could prove useful.

Converting DVD-Videos with the DivX Create Bundle isn't easy, and it won't work with



The DivX converter is as simple as it looks, but it can still be tricky to use



The DivX Player is also available as a free download



Download movie trailers from www.divx.com

CSS-encrypted discs. Converting non-encrypted discs requires the DivX MPEG2/DVD plug-in, which costs an additional \$10 (around £6), although a free two-week trial is included in the standard download. Even then, dropping a folder of DVD-Video files generates an onslaught of pop-up errors as the software rejects various ancillary files and any Dolby Digital soundtracks. DivX's Help pages eventually directed us to a download to fix the latter issue. After all this we were able to rip a DVD-Video, but the disc's menus and extra features appeared as if they were part of the main video, and the aspect ratio was wrong. When we tried ripping another DVD the menu problem disappeared, but the aspect ratio was still wrong.

Problems ripping DVDs might put potential buyers off, but in a way it's commendable that the designers make few concessions to those who hope to use their software for unlawful copying. However, we wonder who else the package might appeal to. It's ideal for anyone who wants to keep copies of their home videos on a hard disk for quick access, but Microsoft's own WMV format is just as capable, and 2Mbit/s WMV files look and sound just as good as 1.4Mbit/s DivX files.

Building DVD-style menus, subtitles and chapters into the format is inspired, and should see DivX's popularity for internet video distribution continue to grow. However, it's disappointing that the DivX Create Bundle lacks the authoring tools to use these features, as these would have made it perfect for sharing home videos online. As it stands, we'd rather stick with the WMV format, which is free and installed on many more PCs.

Ben Pitt

✓ Produces high-quality videos with tiny file sizes

✗ No custom encoding options; poor DVD support

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 733MHz Pentium III processor, 64MB RAM (2.4GHz P4 processor, 384MB RAM for high-definition video)


REVIEW DATA-VISUALISATION SOFTWARE

IOKIO Omniscope

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £225 inc VAT

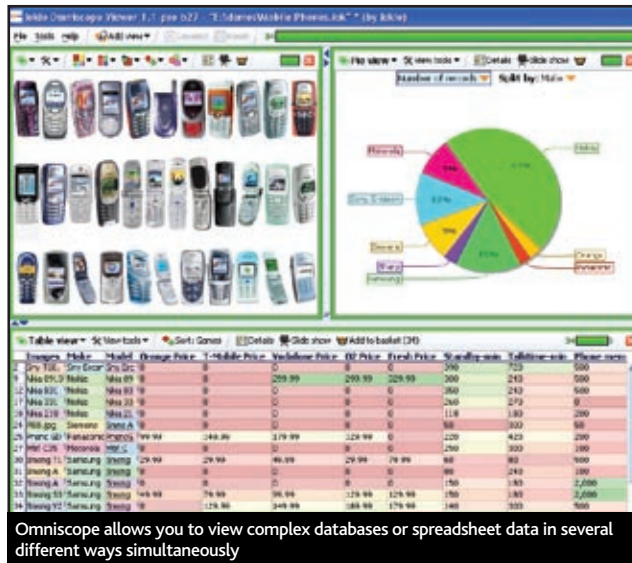
SUPPLIER Iokio 020 7351 4646

DETAILS www.iokio.com

Most spreadsheet programs include tools for turning data into graphs and charts to provide a quick visual representation of the numerical data. Sometimes, though, you may be dealing with particularly complicated sets of data, or simply with a spreadsheet so large that it can't easily be turned into a neat little pie chart.

Omniscope attempts to address this problem. The developers – a British company called Iokio – describe Omniscope as a visualisation tool that enables you to view your data in a number of different ways, making it easier to understand. You can import standard .xls and .csv files from both database and spreadsheet programs and display their data using a series of different views.

These views include the standard pie charts and graphs that you can create in Excel and any other spreadsheet, but some of the other views are more sophisticated. For example, a map view allows you to view the distribution of data geographically, such as the sales of a product in different regions, while a tree view displays information in hierarchical order, perhaps to show the personnel files of staff in terms of seniority or departmental structure. If a database file includes images such as



Omniscope allows you to view complex databases or spreadsheet data in several different ways simultaneously

photographs of products or staff members, you can display those with the rest of the data, making it less dry and abstract.

With Omniscope you can display multiple views of your data at the same time, so you could have a pie chart that gives a quick overview and a detailed table or chart that provides more extensive information. It also includes a number of filtering options that allow you to show or hide specific sets of data instantly, so you can spot trends or compare one subset of data easily with another. Once you have analysed your data you can share your findings with others, who can view your charts using the free Omniscope Viewer from Iokio's website.

Business or scientific users who regularly deal with large amounts of numerical data will find that Omniscope helps them make sense of it all. However, the program has one rather ironic weakness.

For a program that focuses on visualisation, Omniscope is not actually very attractive to look at. Many of the graphs and charts are presented as rather crude slabs of colour; there's little use of transparency or the graduated colours so beloved of PowerPoint presentations. The graphics are also resolutely two-dimensional, when even Excel provides some basic 3D graphs and charts. To be fair, though, Omniscope is not a

presentation tool, and its real emphasis is on data analysis rather than eye-catching graphics.

Omniscope is also a little expensive. However, it could be a useful aid for anyone who's struggling to make sense of large amounts of data and statistics.

Cliff Joseph

✓ Allows you to view complex spreadsheet and database files in a variety of graphical formats

✗ Expensive; interface and graphics presentation could be much improved

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 1GHz processor (1.56GHz recommended), 256MB RAM (512MB recommended), 500MB disk space

HOTLIST OFFICE SUITE

ABILITY SOFTWARE Ability Office 4

RATING ★★★★★

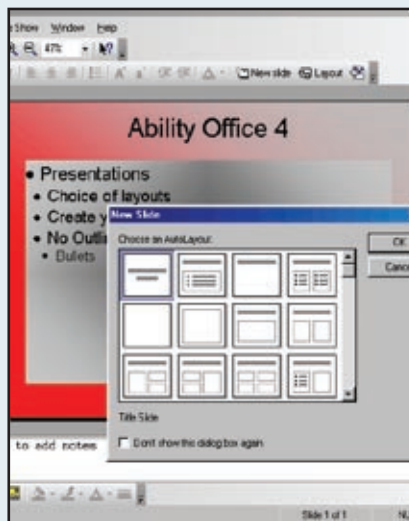
PRICE Professional Edition £50 inc VAT (upgrade £25); Standard/Small Business Edition £40 inc VAT (upgrade £20)

DETAILS www.ability.com

Buying an office suite doesn't necessarily mean spending a lot of money, as Ability shows us with its Office 4 suite. For just £50 for the Professional Edition, it undercuts the competition by a mile but still offers a functional package.

The latest version introduces the new Presentation program, which competes against Microsoft's PowerPoint. It's compatible with its competitor, bar a couple of features such as embedded video. This means that a few PowerPoint presentations won't open properly in Ability and you'll have to start your work from scratch. To facilitate this, Ability offers 20 slide layouts for slideshows.

The other big feature is Ability Mail. It's not included on the CD, but is available as a free download from the Ability website for registered users. It's the final piece in the puzzle for moving away from a Microsoft-based productivity suite.



Ability Office 4 also updates Ability Database. One of the strengths of the suite, the database now provides easier form design and reporting. Ability Write has the welcome additions of Autocorrect, Autotext and Grammar Checker. These features put the application on a par with Microsoft Word.

For the price it's very good value, although we recommend downloading the trial version to make sure all the features you need are present.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, 100MB disk space

HOTLIST VOICE-TO-TEXT SOFTWARE

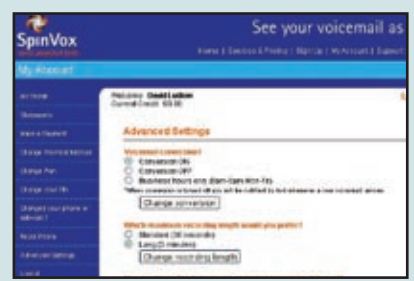
SPINVOX Voice Powered Text

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £5 per month for 20 messages
DETAILS www.spinvox.com


If you think that voicemail is an annoying way to receive messages, you'll love Spinvox's Voice Powered Text. This software converts all your voice messages to text files and sends them to you via SMS or email. The conversion is accurate and easy to follow. The basic £5 per month service should suit most people, but there are more expensive plans available for people who regularly receive more messages than this.

REQUIREMENTS Mobile phone and contract; internet connection to manage account online





REVIEW CAD SOFTWARE

MSI SOFTWARE
TurboCAD Deluxe 11

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £80 inc VAT; £40 upgrade

SUPPLIER TurboCAD 020 7221 4600

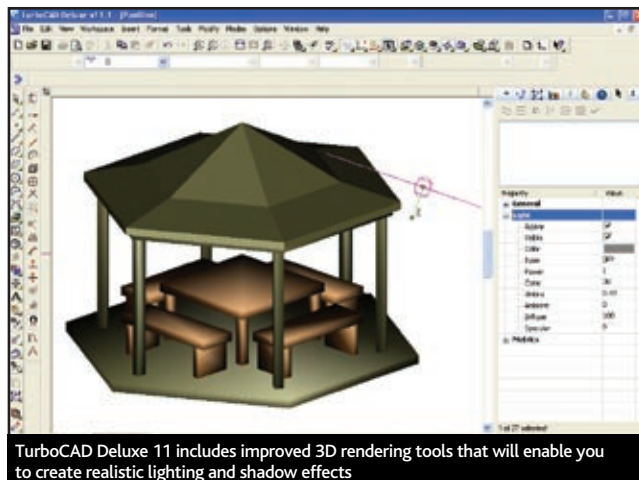
DETAILS www.turbocad.co.uk

When a product gets to version 11 you start to wonder if there's anything more the developers can do to improve it. The makers of TurboCAD Deluxe are clearly struggling with this problem, as the new upgrade has a fairly modest list of new features. Fortunately, most of these features are worthwhile additions, and the low cost of upgrading to version 11 should ensure that existing TurboCAD users are happy to make the change.

The program can now import and export DWG and DXF files, which the industry-standard design tool AutoCAD uses. This means you'll be able to share files with most other CAD designers in other organisations or in your own company.

It also has improved rendering options for 3D graphics. TurboCAD Deluxe now supports the Lightworks system, which enables you to create realistic lighting effects including shadows and attenuated light sources where the light intensity gradually fades with distance. TurboCAD Deluxe is no substitute for a dedicated 3D modelling program, but its rendering tools are quite effective and they enable you to create some very high-quality 3D imagery.

In the traditional 2D drawing mode, the program now includes a Hatch Editor that



TurboCAD Deluxe 11 includes improved 3D rendering tools that will enable you to create realistic lighting and shadow effects

allows you to make your own hatch designs (a hatch is a pattern used to fill 2D shapes such as circles and squares and is comparable to the fill patterns in ordinary drawing programs). The standard hatches provided are mostly simple repeating patterns of lines or dots and dashes, but you can supplement these with your own hatches that use effects such as transparency and graduated colours.

The new version also includes an interesting feature called xrefs. These are external references that link your current document to an existing document. If you're creating a series of blueprints that share a number of common elements, for example, you can store these elements in their own files and use the xref option to link them to any new blueprints you create subsequently. This is a useful timesaving option, but it highlights

the fact that many other aspects of TurboCAD Deluxe would benefit from similar timesaving improvements.

Despite its low price, TurboCAD Deluxe is an extremely powerful and complex program, and its interface and documentation are rather dense and unhelpful. The manual often lists features without giving you any real idea about how they work. A few more tutorials and wizards would be welcome. The software includes a Page Setup Wizard that helps you set up printing

properties for blueprints and drafts quickly, but additional wizards for creating 3D models, lighting effects and custom hatches would certainly make the program more accessible to new users and improve the productivity of existing users.

The complexity of the program means that TurboCAD Deluxe will appeal mainly to people who already have some CAD or design experience. At just £80, though, it's excellent value.

Cliff Joseph

✓ Powerful CAD software with both 2D drawing and 3D graphics features

✗ Complex interface and unhelpful manual mean you'll need some experience of CAD work

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000 or XP, 300MHz processor (1.5GHz recommended), 256MB RAM (512MB recommended), 200MB disk space, OpenGL-compatible graphics card recommended

HOTLIST ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE

F-SECURE
Anti-Virus 2005

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £26 inc VAT

SUPPLIER F-Secure 01223 478800

DETAILS www.f-secure.com

One of the cheapest anti-virus products on the market, F-Secure's Anti-Virus is also one of the best. Its interface is clean and easy to use, and when we downloaded infected emails its pop-up listed the viruses but didn't halt the rest of the download.

With excellent detection across the board, it's great value for money and worthy of our Best Buy award.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium II processor, 128MB RAM, 30MB disk space



HOTLIST DTP SOFTWARE

SERIF
PagePlus 10

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £100 inc VAT; £50 upgrade

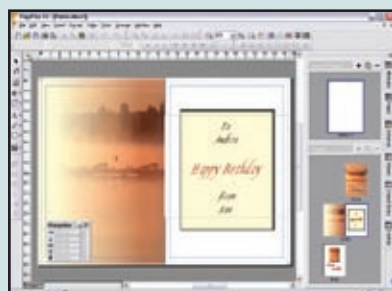
from any Serif product

SUPPLIER Serif 08003 767070

DETAILS www.serif.com

Serif's PagePlus 10 is aimed at the consumer who doesn't need the complexity of Adobe's InDesign. The latest version is even easier to use and allows anyone to create professional-looking publications. The price is similar to that of Microsoft's Publisher, but this product remains our favourite.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium processor, 256MB RAM, 300MB disk space. **Product code** B0002TS2Y

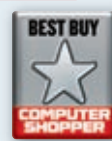


HOTLIST VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE

SONY
Vegas 6 +DVD

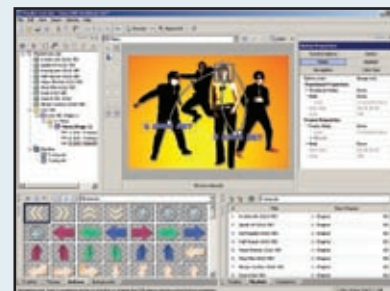
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £440 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.sirentechology.co.ukDETAILS www.mediasoftware.sonypictures.com

Sony's Vegas 6 introduces a raft of new features. This professional editing platform includes comprehensive high-definition video (HDV) support. The program itself costs £300, but if you buy the production suite you'll get DVD Architect too. This software's lower price and excellent range of features give it the edge over Adobe Premiere.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space, DVD writer. **Product code** SON22359





REVIEW 3D GRAPHICS SOFTWARE

PANDROMEDA SOFTWARE

MojoWorld 3.0

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £166 inc VAT

SUPPLIER europe_info@eovia.comDETAILS www.eovia.com

They say that God took six days to create the world. If He had invented MojoWorld first, He could have done it in about half an hour and taken the rest of the week off.

There are a number of 3D graphics programs around that can be used to create realistic 3D landscapes, but MojoWorld goes much further. It enables you to design entire 3D planets complete with continental landmasses, oceans and atmospheric effects. You can even add a few rings like the ones around Saturn to give your planet a more individual appearance.

This makes MojoWorld a fairly specialised piece of software. However, it has a large following in fields such as animation and illustration, not to mention the many people who simply like mucking about with computer graphics. MojoWorld comes in both standard and professional versions, which cost £166 and £405 respectively. The underlying MojoWorld program is the same in both cases, but the professional version includes extra plug-ins that provide more powerful animation and editing tools.

Like most 3D programs, MojoWorld has a rather complex and intimidating interface. It is



Welcome to my world: MojoWorld can create entire 3D virtual planets, complete with sophisticated lighting and stellar background effects

awash with odd-looking icons and buttons, the purpose of which is a complete mystery at first. Fortunately, the manual provided is clear and comprehensive, and includes a number of tutorials to help get you started.

Even better is the Planet Wizard, which introduces you to the main ideas behind MojoWorld's planet-building tools. The Planet Wizard enables you to select eight main elements quickly, such as the terrain, oceans, atmosphere, planetary rings and even a starry background for the sky.

Once you understand how those main elements work, you can enter the main generator window and use the program's more detailed tools to modify them and customise the appearance of your new planet. There are navigation tools for moving around your world, along with additional

graphics tools that enable you to add simple 3D objects to your scenes and import graphics from other programs. It also has some fun features such as parameter bombs, which you can use to create localised effects such as small rivers and hills.

Once you've finished playing God you can switch to Layout mode and use the rendering tools to create a final, photorealistic image. You can then save your planets as self-contained files, which anyone with the free MojoWorld Viewer program can open.

MojoWorld is a powerful program, but with its complicated interface and specialised approach it will appeal mainly to professional designers and illustrators who have the time and skill to master all its features. Hobbyists who just like to experiment with 3D graphics would be better off with MojoWorld's less expensive stablemate, the ever-wonderful Bryce, which is included on this month's cover DVD.

Cliff Joseph

✓ Powerful photorealistic 3D graphics program that can create entire virtual worlds

✗ Complex interface and tools mean this isn't a program for novices

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 400MHz processor (1GHz recommended), 128MB RAM (512MB recommended), 200MB disk space, OpenGL graphics card with 32MB video RAM

HOTLIST CREATIVE & DESIGN SOFTWARE

ADOBE Creative Suite 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Standard edition £786 inc VAT (upgrade £375); Premium edition £1,040 inc VAT (upgrade £500)

SUPPLIER Adobe 0131 458 6842

DETAILS www.adobe.co.uk

Creative Suite 2 is a superb bundle of high-end products, including Photoshop, InDesign and Live Trace. Each product's features complement each other and they are all neatly tied together under a single interface. Each application also features a range of new tools such as Photoshop's Vanishing Point tool, which makes photo editing in perspective much easier. This suite is great value compared to the standalone prices.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000 or XP with QuickTime 6.5, 500MHz processor (1GHz recommended), 384MB RAM (1GB recommended), 2.5GB disk space



HOTLIST VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE

ADOBE Premiere Elements

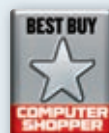
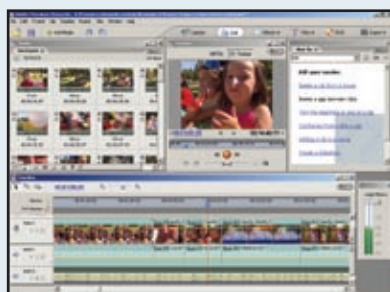
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £53 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.comDETAILS www.adobe.co.uk

Premiere Elements is a cut-down version of the professional Premiere Pro video-editing application. It offers many of the same tools, and it's a powerful editing package. It is leagues ahead of other cheap editors and well worth buying if you have a DV camera and want to turn your footage into something special.

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP with SP1, 800MHz Pentium III or Athlon XP, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB disk space. **Product code** 25530008



HOTLIST HOSTING PACKAGE

1AND1 Microsoft Home

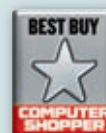
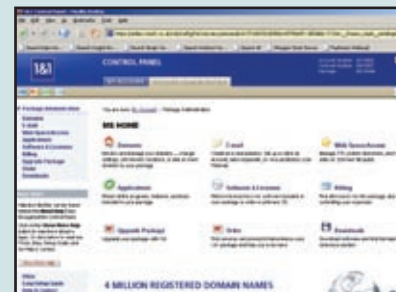
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £5.86 per month, £70 a year

DETAILS www.1and1.co.uk

If you want to run a website above and beyond the simple web space that you get with your ISP, you'll need a dedicated hosting package such as 1and1's Microsoft Home. You get 800MB of web space, 10GB of data transfers a month, a free .co.uk domain name and 300 email addresses. This web hosting pack, with its simple control panel and bundled scripts, is excellent value.

REQUIREMENTS Internet access, web browser





REVIEW BUSINESS-PLANNING SOFTWARE

THE BUSINESS SOFTWARE CENTRE

Ultimate Business Planner

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £80 inc VAT

SUPPLIER The Business Software Centre

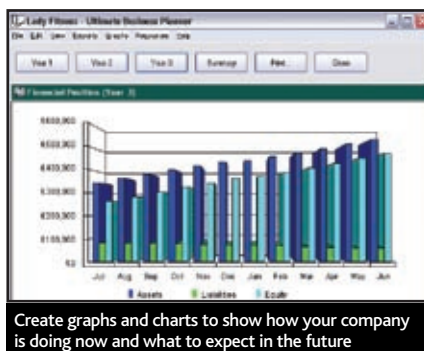
08454 507221

DETAILS www.businesssoftwarecentre.com

The Business Software Centre's Ultimate Business Planner is designed to help you create a professional plan from scratch. The software has been designed with non-technical users in mind. Creating a plan is a step-by-step process, which has been broken into two sections: writing your plan and creating a financial forecast.

While Ultimate Business Planner is aimed at start-up businesses, you could also use it to produce financial forecasts or acquire a loan to expand an existing business. The software builds a three-year plan, but you can go back and change the details to create 'what if' scenarios.

The idea is that even those with no business expertise can follow each step to build a well-structured plan. Along the way the software provides expert hints and tips to help you through the process. Ultimate Business Planner has been written for users in the UK, so all the taxation information relates to UK tax payers. The software even tells you when your accounts are due and provides the tax rates depending on your projected income.

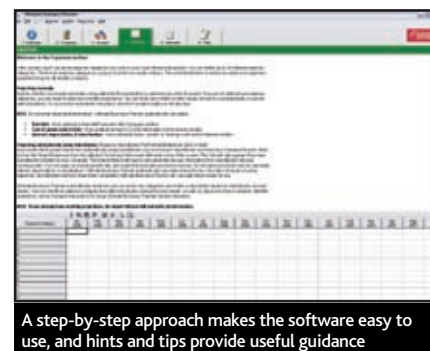


When you first start the program it takes you through a six-step planning process. Here you enter all the relevant information about your business, from basic details such as the name and address to information on income, expenses, assets, liabilities and equity. Once you have entered all this data the final step is to write up your plan.

As you tackle each new page of information, you can read advice on exactly what data is required, plus tips on how to maximise the competitiveness of your business. We found these tips really useful and perfectly comprehensible to the less business minded, which is unusual in software of this type. That said, you'll need a solid understanding of your business's finances to get the most out of this software, so complete beginners may still find parts of the program baffling.

If you're using the software to forecast for an existing business that uses Intuit's QuickBooks, you can import data directly from it, which speeds things up a bit.

The software also includes 1,000 sample plans, so if you're not confident enough to create your



own, you can use one of these off-the-peg plans. Unless you run an identical business, however, these offer little more than inspiration, as you will have to substitute your own information to build your plan.

Once you have written a plan, you can use a range of graphs and charts to look at financial information and make projections about profit and loss, expenses, income and so on. These provide a clear picture of how your business stands, and you can adjust them by changing the information in your plan.

Ultimate Business Planner is a good tool for the budding entrepreneur, although its slightly boring interface lets it down a little.

Sam Ellis

✓ Built for UK users; genuinely useful hints and tips

✗ Requires solid financial knowledge; relatively boring interface

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or above, Pentium processor, 16MB RAM, 20MB disk space, VGA monitor, CD-ROM drive

HOTLIST REMOTE CONTROL SOFTWARE

3AM LABS

LogMeIn

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Free; Professional edition

\$13 (around £7) per month

SUPPLIER www.3amlabs.comDETAILS www.logmein.com

If you have ever needed to access your PC while you've been away, LogMeIn is just the software for you. The free version gives you full remote control of your PC over the internet and works brilliantly.

The Professional version adds support for file transfers and guest invitations and lets you use email to send links to files on your PC. It's an excellent piece of software for anyone who does a lot of remote work.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Internet Explorer, broadband internet connection



HOTLIST WEB BROWSER

MOZILLA

Firefox 1.0

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Free

SUPPLIER www.firefox.com

Firefox 1.0 is by far the best web browser we've ever used. Introducing advanced features such as tabbed browsing and support for RSS feeds, it is leaps and bounds ahead of Internet Explorer. When you also consider that it's better at rendering pages and is more secure, there's little excuse not to use it.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 500MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 52MB disk space



HOTLIST UTILITIES SUITE

SYMANTEC

SystemWorks 2005

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £45 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Symantec 01628 592222

DETAILS www.symantec.co.uk

Keeping your PC running properly is a difficult task made a lot easier by SystemWorks. A One Button Checkup feature gives your PC a thorough examination and fixes any problems it comes across.

With Norton AntiVirus to protect your PC and GoBack 4.0 to make regular backups, PC woes can be fixed quickly and efficiently.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 180MB disk space, IE 5.5 or above. Product code B0002TSZ2Y





REVIEW LOTTERY UTILITY

CCA SOFTWARE
Lottery Cracker AE

RATING ★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

DETAILS CCA Software 0161 429 7095

SUPPLIER www.rawcomputing.co.uk

The UK's National Lottery has grown since its launch in September 1995 and now includes a number of separate draws held a couple of times a week, as well as the chance to play every day. If you're a regular player, keeping track of all the different games can be confusing. Lottery Cracker aims to take the stress out of it.

To help you keep track of your play, the software lets you enter your numbers or those of everyone in your syndicate. It also keeps a record of the winning numbers in any of the draws, including Lotto, Thunderball, Daily Play, Euromillions, Lotto Extra and Lotto Hot Picks. You can enter these manually or download them automatically from the internet.

Once you have this data you can really put Lottery Cracker to good use. It can show which numbers are drawn most often, calculate the ratio of odd and even numbers and suggest numbers to play based on a range of other statistics. It can even show you how to use a wheel system to cover a larger selection of numbers more effectively. Generating sets of numbers to play is as easy as choosing the game and clicking a single button. If you save the numbers you have entered into a draw the software can automatically check your entries against the results to see if you have won.

Before you get carried away with dreams of buying Caribbean islands, be aware that the software has a few downsides. Little thought has been put into the way it looks, and you can't open two sections at a time, so you can't compare the various numbers and statistics.

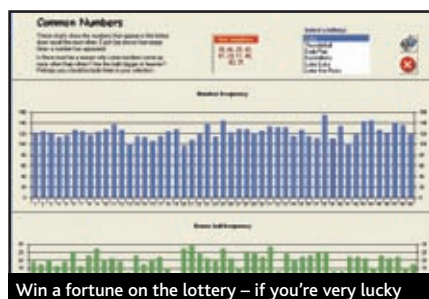
If you're serious about playing the lottery and don't want the hassle of keeping track of the results, this is a handy piece of software. If, on the other hand, you think the scientific study of random events is a load of old tosh, you're more likely to spend Lottery Cracker's £25 asking price on a few extra lottery tickets.

Matt Chapman

✓ Checks your lottery tickets automatically

✗ Unlikely to pay for itself in increased winnings

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98/Me/2000/XP, Pentium processor, 64MB RAM



REVIEW ADVANCED CALENDAR PROGRAM

MAMUT SOFTWARE
Mamut Home

RATING ★

PRICE Mamut Home Free free; Mamut Home

Start £29 inc VAT; Mamut Home Standard

£39 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Mamut 0800 032 5616

DETAILS www.mamut.com

Mamut Home advanced calendar software tries to bring order to the chaos of our busy lives. Unfortunately, it's less easy to use than similar programs. For example, when you use the calendar in Microsoft Outlook, double-clicking a date opens a new entry. In Mamut Home you have to click a tiny button to open a new calendar entry, and it always opens with today's details rather than those of the day you want.

Mamut Home falls short of Outlook in many other ways. For example, the boxes you type information into have a limited number of spaces, so if you type too many letters in an entry it won't appear in full.

While it's not that user-friendly, it does have some useful sections, including the ability to log all the relevant information about your cars or motorbikes. However, many superfluous sections have been added to flesh it out. How many people have bothered to calculate the gross surface area and living surface area in their homes? Home users are also unlikely to be tempted by the additional functions in Mamut Home Standard. The extra sections on diet, fitness, travel and leisure are likely to be covered by a user's diary entries anyway.

If you have a broadband connection you can use the constantly updated Mamut Information Desk, which offers tips and news on a single page. However, we found the service slow to update even over a very fast internet connection. The content is also business oriented, making it less useful for home users.

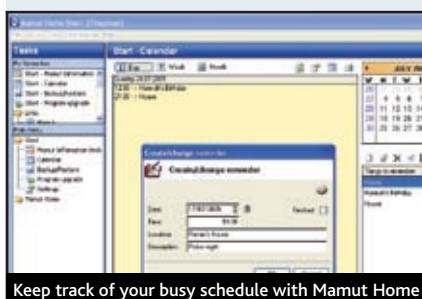
Until the interface has been improved and the information better tailored to its intended audience, this is one to avoid.

Matt Chapman

✓ Some useful sections

✗ Not user-friendly; many useless features

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98/Me/2000/XP, 300MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, Internet Explorer 6.0, 400MB disk space



REVIEW REMOTE PC ACCESS

GOTOMYPC
GoToMyPC

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE \$20 (around £11) per month; \$179

(around £100) per year

SUPPLIER GoToMyPC 00800 5744 2340

DETAILS www.gotomypc.com

Remote-access software is nothing new. Technical support staff have been using it over company networks for years so that they don't have to visit users' PCs when something goes wrong. Now the same principle has been applied over the internet to allow users to log in to each other's PCs.

So is it safe? Well, it's as safe as anything can be on the internet. The system uses AES encryption with 128-bit keys and a personal user code for each PC, so anyone who doesn't have these can't access your PC. When you invite someone to view your PC, you're asked for your password before they can connect, and you can't save this to make it automatic. Typing in your username and password every time can get annoying, but at least you know that no-one else is giving away access to your PC in your absence. You can also set up extra levels of one-off passwords for extra security.

Inviting someone to work on your PC is easy. Simply right-click the MYPC logo in the System Tray and choose that option from the list. The person you invite has to download the GoToMyPC viewer when they first connect, but from then on they can browse your PC as if they were sitting at the keyboard. Even Linux and Mac users can open your files using the Universal Viewer.

If you don't like emailing work home, you can use GoToMyPC to copy files from one computer to another. You can even work on files between PCs, cutting and pasting between documents on separate PCs, for example.

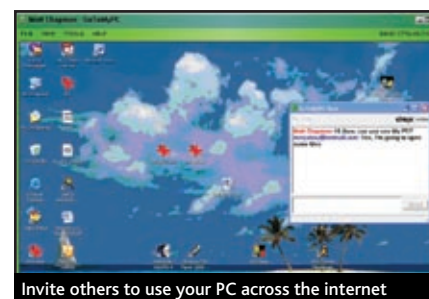
GoToMyPC is a decent product and is very fast. However, it is beaten on value for money by LogMeIn (see Hotlist on page 57). This has a free version providing excellent remote control. LogMeIn's Pro service is cheaper than GoToMyPC and has a wider range of options, including the ability to send someone a link to download a file from your PC.

Matt Chapman

✓ Secure and flexible remote access

✗ LogMeIn Pro is cheaper and provides more features

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95/98/2000/Me/NT/XP/Server 2003, 300MHz Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, Internet Explorer/ Netscape Navigator 4.0/ Mozilla Firefox 1.0, broadband internet connection





REVIEW MEDIA PLAYER

MAGIX

mp3 maker centurion 2005

RATING ★★

PRICE £20 inc VAT

DETAILS www.magix.comSUPPLIER www.fasttrak.co.uk

If you have an MP3 player or you download music, you need software to organise and play your collection. There's no shortage of choice: Windows' built-in Media Player 10 does the job extremely well, as does Apple's iTunes and many other free players. Anything that costs £20 needs to be pretty special to compete.

Mp3 maker centurion covers all the functions we'd expect. Music collections are sorted by artist, album, year or genre, and tracks can be played from the library, arranged into playlists, burnt to CD and converted to other formats. There's the usual collection of visualisations and a range of mostly pointless audio effects. Web radio is built in, but most of the 2,500 stations offered were inactive when we tried them.

It has plenty of less common features, too. Music Editor is a sub-program for editing stereo files. Musicians might appreciate this, although the free Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>) offers a similar set of tools. A new Auto DJ mode analyses the tempo of tracks and adjusts their playback speed for seamless DJ-style mixing. It's impressively accurate, but it's a shame there are no manual DJ controls.

Best of the new features is extended format support: the software can play and create AAC files as used by iTunes and iPods. It can also play DRM-protected WMA tracks as long as the track is licensed to your PC, but it can't play protected AAC files bought from Apple's iTunes Store.

Mp3 maker centurion has advantages over Windows Media Player and iTunes, but it's not as easy to use. The search function is clunky, it couldn't read all our MP3s' ID3 tags and odd bits of German text appeared onscreen. Unless you desperately need AAC and WMA playback in the same place, stick with the freebies.

Ben Pitt

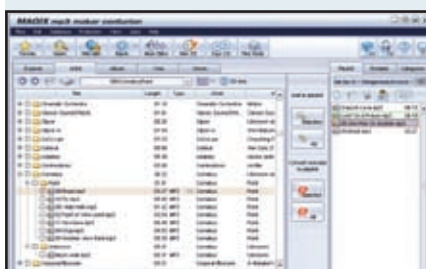


Supports all music formats; packed with features



Could be more elegant; the competition is free

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 600MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 250MB disk space



mp3 maker centurion isn't as elegant as iTunes

REVIEW GUITAR TUTOR

GSP

Musicalis Interactive Guitar Course

RATING ★★

PRICE £20 inc VAT

SUPPLIER GSP 01480 496666

DETAILS www.gsp.cc

Learning the guitar can bring years of pleasure but, as with most forms of happiness, there's a price to pay. Practising scales is about as interesting as reciting times tables.

Interactive Guitar Course aims to take the drudgery out of disciplined practice. It comes with eight pieces of music, each with a lead riff and rhythm guitar part for you to learn. Each part also comes with a handful of exercises to help reinforce the techniques used. For the lead guitar parts this is tantamount to practising scales, but with a backing band to play along with and notes appearing onscreen, keeping your motivation up is a lot easier than it would be with unaccompanied practice.

The software provides score and TAB notation, an animated fretboard and even QuickTime movies to help you master each guitar part. These generally do the job, but the score and TAB displays don't scroll to the next page in time for you to prepare for the next note. Using the rewind controls to go back a bar or two shifts the score and TAB displays around onscreen in a confusing manner, so it's easy to lose your place.

These aren't the only frustrations. The videos pop up in a window, but you need to stop playback in the main window first to prevent both playing at the same time. A loop button is provided to help you practise tricky passages, but it didn't do anything when we tried it. Only the pop-up Help gives the exercises any context and direction, making it essential reading, but opening it renders the rest of the software inaccessible. There's no help available anywhere to explain how to use the software.

The exercises themselves are reasonably fun and useful, but overall we found this software more frustrating than inspiring.

Ben Pitt

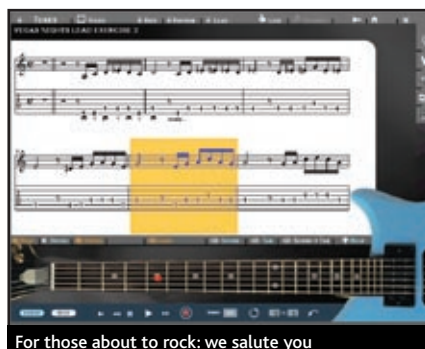


A good selection of exercises for improving your technique



Poor production values

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95/98/Me/XP, 300MHz Pentium, 64MB RAM



For those about to rock: we salute you

REVIEW ARCHIVE SOFTWARE

ALLUME

ZipMagic Deluxe 9

RATING ★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER PC World 08702 420444

DETAILS www.allume.com

Previously known as Stuffit Deluxe, Allume's archive software has changed its name to ZipMagic. It supports both Zip and Stuffit archives, and the Zip Folder part of the application integrates with Windows Explorer.

ZipMagic lets you browse Zip files as you would any other Windows folder. You can open a file in a Zip archive directly from any application without having to extract it first. The support goes so deep into Windows that archived images even appear as thumbnails.

While this works really well, it's a shame that the same level of support isn't offered for the software's own Stuffit archives. Stuffit compression is technically superior and can now compress JPEG files, which other archives don't deal with as well.

ZipMagic's documentation claims 30 per cent compression, but we saw an average of 23 per cent. It's useful if you're emailing or transferring large numbers of files, but unless you create self-extracting archives the recipient will also need a copy of ZipMagic.

Unfortunately, you can't browse Stuffit archives as though they were folders. The nearest thing to this Allume provides is a thumbnail browser application that lets you view images stored in a Stuffit file before you extract them. It takes a good few mouse clicks to get to this point and misses the simple integration that Zip files have with Zip Folders.

Other than this, the software is very similar to its predecessors. It has a simple drag-and-drop mode for creating archives, plus a full console in which you can schedule tasks. While the photo compression works well, it's a shame that it's not integrated with Windows. If you work with a lot of compressed archives it's a good choice; otherwise we'd stick with the far simpler and cheaper WinZip.

David Ludlow



Compresses images; Zip folders integrate with Windows



Stuffit archives don't appear as folders

SPECIFICATIONS Windows 98 or above, Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, 300MB disk space



Get stuffed: ZipMagic makes archiving seamless



REVIEW INTERNET ACCELERATION

ONSPEED

OnSpeed Pocket PC version

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT per year

SUPPLIER OnSpeed 08707 585859

DETAILS www.onspeed.com

If you connect your Pocket PC to the internet over a GPRS connection, you face slow download speeds and high data costs. OnSpeed's Pocket PC software can help.

This routes all your web traffic through OnSpeed's servers, which compress your downloads. As well as increasing data speed – it shaved a few seconds off the loading time of www.computershopper.co.uk – it reduces the cost of your data. We visited our favourite websites and compressed more than 600KB of data down to 180KB. Over a year of regular use you'll easily save the cost of the software. It comes with its own data register, so you can see how well it's compressing your traffic and how much money you're saving.

The service copes best with text, but it does quite a good job of images by changing the quality settings. On the small screen of a PDA anything but the lowest quality setting is easy to read, but you can change the options until you're happy with the results. This is the only setting you can change and compression is otherwise handled automatically.

Unfortunately, this version of OnSpeed works only with web traffic. The PC version also accelerates other services including email.

Considering the Pocket PC version costs exactly the same, we'd have expected equivalent features.

The Pocket PC version is also less streamlined than the PC version. When we started Internet Explorer without connecting the GPRS first the OnSpeed client failed to work and disabled itself.

We spoke to OnSpeed's technical support, who warned us that when mobile cells get very busy they stop the software working, but that this is very rare. Finally, OnSpeed works only with Pocket PC PDAs and not smartphones.

If you have a PDA and you do a lot of web browsing, this is a good way to save money, but the lack of email support makes it seem expensive compared to the PC version.

David Ludlow

✓ Helps save money over your GPRS connection

✗ Doesn't support email or smartphones

REQUIREMENTS Microsoft Pocket PC 2003/Windows CE 4.2, internet connection



Save money on your GPRS data calls with OnSpeed

REVIEW EMAIL SYSTEM

1AND1

Microsoft Exchange Email

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £85 inc VAT per user, per year

DETAILS www.1and1.co.uk

These days it's easy to access your email on the move. There are dozens of free webmail services available, and many mobile phones include a full email client. If your business involves a lot of travelling, though, you'll probably need access to more than just email.

Microsoft's Exchange Server allows you to store and work with contacts, appointments and notes as well as emails, but exchange servers can be too costly for many small businesses. In effect 1and1's Exchange email account allows you to rent an Exchange server for £6 plus VAT per user, per month.

Once you've bought an account, you can access your email, contacts and calendar in several ways, wherever you are. The easiest is to log in using a web browser. This gives you a kind of supercharged webmail system, with access to your contacts, notes, files, appointments and email. Alternatively, if you have a Pocket PC that's connected to the internet, you can use ActiveSync to synchronise its data with the server.

You can even use a conventional email client. A copy of Microsoft Outlook 2003 is included with every account, and this version can be connected to the remote server. This process works only on Windows XP, but 1and1 provides a handy data file that sets up your software automatically. When you have finished using Outlook it synchronises your data with the server, so it's always up to date.

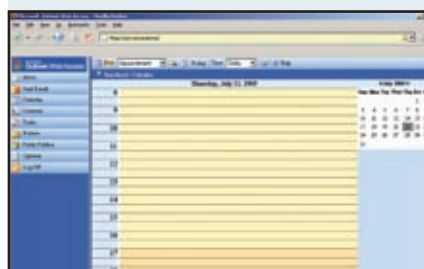
The control panel allows you to add more users to your server, so you can use Exchange's collaboration features for jobs such as scheduling meetings. Every account has 1GB of storage, which is significantly more than other, similar services offer. It's too expensive for most home users, but if you work with a few colleagues and need access to your data anywhere, this package could be ideal.

Tom Royal

✓ A powerful email system that you can access anywhere

✗ Not necessary for home users

REQUIREMENTS FOR OUTLOOK 2003 Windows XP, 233MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 150MB disk space



Access your email, contacts and calendar anywhere

REVIEW RINGTONE MAKER

FOCUS

MULTIMEDIA

Magix Ringtone Maker SE

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £10 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.woolworths.co.ukDETAILS www.focusmm.co.uk

People make judgements about you all the time, and the sound that echoes from your mobile phone can portray you as clever, over-the-hill or unfashionable. But you don't have to shell out for this week's top ringtone. If your phone supports real music formats such as MP3, WAV or SMAF (see www.focusmm.co.uk/ringtone/compatibility.htm to find out) you can furnish your phone with the latest tunes using Ringtone Maker SE.

The best thing about the software is that it's very easy to use. The first time you start the program a tutorial runs through a simple ringtone creation, and you can revisit this at any time from the install disc. You can use music files from your hard disk, a CD or Magix's own online selection. You can blend four separate tracks together to make the final sound and you can even record sounds to drop in at specific points, so you can create a truly personal and unique ringtone.

The software's biggest problem is what it doesn't let you do. It can't deal with Windows Media Audio (WMA) files, which is a pain if you have saved all your music files in that format to save space on your MP3 player. There's also no option to save MIDI files for use on earlier phones.

Once you have finished your ringtone, you should have no problem getting it on your phone if you have a Bluetooth or infrared connection with your PC, or you know where to drop the file using a USB connection.

If your habit for new ringtones is costing you a fortune, the low cost is the biggest reason to buy this software. However, as more phones play MP3s as standard it takes only a free piece of splitting software from the internet to create a snippet of music to use as a ringtone, making this software obsolete for those who won't use the more advanced features.

Matt Chapman

✓ Easy to use; cheap enough considering the possible savings on downloaded ringtones

✗ No support for WMA files

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, 400MHz Pentium or equivalent, 64MB RAM, 350MB disk space



Could you be the next Crazy Frog? Let's hope not